

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
DIVISION OF NAVAL HISTORY (OP-29)
SHIP'S HISTORIES SECTION

HISTORY OF USS CANBERRA (CAG 2)

USS CANBERRA (CAG 2), a guided missile heavy cruiser, is named for the city of Canberra, Australia, commemorating the loss of the Australian cruiser HMAS CANBERRA in the First Battle of Savo Island, 9 August 1942.

CANBERRA was originally built as a heavy cruiser (CA 70) by the Bethlehem Steel Company of Quincy, Massachusetts. Her keel was laid 3 September 1941 and she was launched 19 April 1943 under the sponsorship of Lady Alice C. Dixon, wife of the Australian Minister to the United States. The ship was placed in commission at the Boston Navy Yard on 14 October 1943 under the command of Captain A. R. Early, USN.

On 25 November 1943 CANBERRA sailed on shakedown training cruise to Trinidad, British West Indies. She returned to Boston on 31 December for post-shakedown overhaul and departed for the Pacific on 14 January 1944. She embarked passengers at San Diego and arrived at Pearl Harbor on 1 February 1944.

CANBERRA conducted brief training operations in the Hawaiian area then steamed to take part in the capture and occupation of the Marshall Islands. On 14 February 1944, she made rendezvous with Vice Admiral Mitscher's famed Carrier Task Force 58 and became a screening unit of a carrier task group under the command of Rear Admiral Samuel P. Ginder in carrier SARATOGA. She operated with the task group for strikes against Eniwetok, Marshall Islands until that atoll was secured on 27 February. CANBERRA put into newly won Majuro Lagoon on 1 March then joined the YORKTOWN carrier task group at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides Islands. On 23 March the task group sailed for carrier strikes on Palau, Yap, and Woleai Islands, returning to Majuro on 6 April 1944.

While at Majuro, CANBERRA became a screening unit of the ENTERPRISE carrier group and departed 13 April for air strikes against Hollandia and Wakde airfields, in support of the landings of General MacArthur's troops in New Guinea. On 29 April 1944 the task group commenced fighter sweeps against Truk. The next day CANBERRA joined Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf's Satawan Bombardment Group. At 1610 she commenced shelling that island, scoring 20-25 hits on the landing strip, and starting three fires, including one large oil fire. The bombardment group rejoined the carriers on 1 May for further strikes on Truk that same day and returned to Majuro on 4 May 1944.

CANBERRA joined the carrier task group of Rear Admiral A. E. Montgomery in the new carrier WASP, departing Majuro on 15 May for a training practice raid against Marcus and Wake Islands and returning 26 May 1944. She then joined the screen of Rear Admiral H. H. Reeves task group which included the carriers HORNET, YORKTOWN, BELLEAU WOOD, and BATAAN. In company with Vice Admiral Mitscher's Task Force 58, this task group sailed on 6 June 1944 to take part in the capture and occupation of the Marianas Islands.

From 11-13 June 1944, the carriers launched preliminary strikes against airfields of Guam and Rota Islands, then steamed north for strikes on Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima in the Bonin Islands. While returning from these strikes the carrier aircraft conducted long range searches for units of a large Japanese Fleet which was reported closing the Marianas. On 19 June 1944, the Battle of the Philippine Sea opened when enemy planes headed for the Task Force were intercepted by fighters from the carriers. The enemy aircraft were driven off without coming within sight of CANBERRA's task group. In this action, commonly referred to as "The Marianas Turkey Shoot", the Japanese lost over 300 planes. Late in the afternoon of 20 June the Japanese Fleet was sighted at extreme range and all available planes were launched to attack. The planes returned from the strike after dark and were guided by searchlights and starshells from ships of the task force. Many were low on fuel and made water landings. CANBERRA maneuvered independently and rescued two aviators from YORKTOWN and one from HORNET. The following day CANBERRA's scouting planes picked up several more downed aviators as the task force steamed in the vicinity of the battle. At sundown of 21 June the pursuit of the Japanese Fleet was abandoned and another strike was made on Iwo Jima before return to Eniwetok on 27 June 1944. Again off Iwo Jima on 4 July, CANBERRA formed with a bombardment group to shell the east side of that island, starting many fires and explosions in the area of the southern airfield. She then screened the carriers during repeated air strikes on Guam and Rota in the Marianas Islands, and against the Southern Palau Islands, returning to Eniwetok on 2 August 1944. During these operations CANBERRA's scouting planes often performed rescue missions in company with carrier planes.

At Eniwetok the designation of Task Force 58 was changed to Task Force 38 with CANBERRA assigned to Vice Admiral J. S. McCain's Task Group 38.1 which included carriers HORNET, WASP, BELLEAU WOOD, and COWPENS. The task group sailed on 29 August for strikes against the Palau Islands, then arrived off the Philippines for repeated strikes against airfields and shipping, with intervening action 15-16 September in support of the landings on Morotai Island. Returning to Manus, Admiralty Islands for replenishment, CANBERRA departed with the Task Force on 2 October 1944. The carrier planes attacked Okinawa on 10 October and the task force arrived off Formosa on 12 October to commence strikes against that island. At dusk an enemy air raid was repelled without damage to ships of the Task Group.

Strikes were continued against Formosa on 13 October 1944. At 1633, enemy planes attacked the Task Group. Three were splashed upon approach but four others came in low on the starboard quarter for a run on CANBERRA who shot down three of the enemy. The remaining plane managed to launch a torpedo before it was shot down in flames about 1500 yards astern. CANBERRA received the torpedo hit between number 3 and 4 firerooms. A large ball of flame shot up about mast high and CANBERRA was jolted with a whip sensation, fore and aft. A few minutes later she was dead in the water with both adjoining enginerooms flooded.

CANBERRA was taken in tow by WICHITA. During the night a task group of four cruisers, six destroyers and two escort carriers under command of Rear Admiral L. T. DuBose was formed to protect the crippled ship. The remainder of the Task Force interposed itself between this group and the Japanese bases on Formosa. WICHITA relinquished tow of CANBERRA to fleet tug MUNSEE in the early morning of 14 October. That night the cruiser HOUSTON which had taken CANBERRA's former screening station was torpedoed by an enemy dive bomber. HOUSTON was taken in tow by cruiser BOSTON and joined the group on 15 October for retirement toward Ulithi. The towing and escort group was appropriately nicknamed "CripDiv 1."

On 16 October 1944, enemy planes attacked "CripDiv 1". Planes from COWPENS downed most of the enemy but a few slipped through and one torpedo bomber scored another torpedo hit into the starboard side of HOUSTON. This enemy plane was splashed by gunfire from CANBERRA.

Learning that the Japanese believed "CripDiv 1" to be the battered remnants of the Third Fleet, Admiral Halsey determined to use "CripDiv 1" as "BaitDiv 1" to lure the Japanese fleet into the open. Accordingly, he withdrew two task groups out of sight to the west and stationed another to the east. The trap almost succeeded. Vice Admiral Shima's Second Striking Force sortied from the Inland Sea of Japan. But upon being attacked by planes from BUNKER HILL he decided that more was left of the Third Fleet than met the eye and discreetly retired. CANBERRA reached Ulithi on 27 October and underwent temporary repairs which enabled her to be towed to Manus, Admiralty Islands where she arrived on 17 November for repairs in a floating drydock.

On 13 January 1945, CANBERRA departed Manus, Admiralty Islands enroute to the east coast of the United States. She arrived at the Boston Navy Yard on 16 February and remained for permanent repairs until 17 October 1945 when she sailed for local operations in Casco Bay, Maine, thence via Baltimore for refresher training while based at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Upon completion of the training period she transited the Panama Canal and arrived at San Pedro, California, on 14 December 1945. She was moored at San Francisco from 9 January to 29 March 1946, then departed for pre-inactivation in the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Washington. She arrived at Bremerton on 1 April 1946 and remained at that port, being placed out of commission in reserve on 7 March 1947.

On 4 January 1952 CANBERRA's hull classification and number was changed from CA-70 to CAG-2. She was towed from Bremerton to the yard of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation of Camden, New Jersey, where conversion to a guided missile heavy cruiser was commenced on 30 June 1952.

USS CANBERRA (CAG 2) was recommissioned at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard on 15 June 1956 under command of Captain Charles T. Mauro, USN. On 22 August she sailed for training exercises in the area of the Virginia Capes, thence via Norfolk and Charleston on shakedown training cruise to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Her training period in the Caribbean included visits to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and Kingston, Jamaica. She returned to Norfolk on 13 December 1956 and after post-shakedown repairs sailed on 4 February 1957, enroute to Guantanamo Bay as flagship of Rear Admiral Daspit, Commander Cruiser Division SIX. She returned to Norfolk on 24 February 1957 to resume local operations from that port.

On 14 March 1957 CANBERRA embarked President Eisenhower, enroute for conference with Great Britain's Prime Minister McMillan at Bermuda where she arrived on 20 March 1957.

CANBERRA returned to Norfolk on 24 March 1957 and continued operations from that port until September. On 12 June 1957, she served as a reviewing ship for the International Naval Review in Hampton Roads, with Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson embarked. The next day she sailed with Midshipmen for a summer training cruise to the Caribbean. Ports of call during this cruise included Santos, Brazil; San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. She returned to Norfolk on 5 August 1957.

On 3 September 1957, CANBERRA departed Norfolk for European waters. She arrived at Largs, Scotland, on 14 September and three days later put to sea to participate with combined units of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in "Operation Strikeback" which was conducted in the North Atlantic and North Sea areas. On 28 September she sailed for the Mediterranean, arriving at Suda Bay, Crete, 7 October to join units of the Sixth Fleet. This tour of duty in the Mediterranean included calls at such ports as Izmir, Turkey; Phaleron Bay, Greece; Naples, Italy; and Barcelona, Spain. She departed Gibraltar on 28 February and returned to Norfolk on 9 March 1958.

On 11 April 1958 CANBERRA departed Norfolk for refresher training while based at Guantanamo Bay, thence to the area off Mayport, Florida, for exercises with USS FORRESTAL before return to Norfolk on 10 May 1958. She was designated ceremonial flagship for the selection of the Unknown of World War II. On 26 May she made rendezvous in the area of the Virginia Capes with destroyer BLANDY who had sailed from Naples with the Unknown of the European Theater of World War II, and BOSTON (CAG-1) which had sailed from Guantanamo Bay with the caskets of the Unknowns of the Pacific Theater of World War II and the Korean War. BOSTON received the Unknown

from BLANDY. All caskets were then transferred by high-line to ceremonial ship CANBERRA where the final selection was made between the two Unknowns of World War II by Hospitalman First Class William R. Charrette, USN, Medal of Honor recipient of Lundington, Michigan. The selected Unknowns of the Korean War and World War II were then transferred to destroyer BLANDY for transport to the Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D. C. and enshrinement on Memorial Day, 30 May 1958, in the Arlington National Cemetery beside the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of World War I. The unselected Unknown was buried at sea with military honors by CANBERRA.

CANBERRA departed Norfolk on 9 June 1958 for a Midshipmen training cruise that took her to Virgo, Spain; Goteborg, Sweden; and Amsterdam. She returned to Norfolk on 7 August 1958 and briefly called at New York before overhaul in the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. She began a second World Cruise 3 March 1960, sailing from Norfolk via the Panama Canal and San Diego to join in the Coral Sea celebration ceremonies at Sydney, Australia (2-14 May). After operations with the Seventh Fleet in waters ranging from the Philippines to Japan and Hong Kong, she transited the Suez Canal for operations in the Mediterranean before crossing the Atlantic for return to Norfolk on 24 October 1960. She joined in the quarantine of Cuba during the Russian Missile Crisis in the Fall of 1962 and departed the East Coast in October 1963 to homeport at San Diego as a unit of the Pacific Fleet.

On 5 January 1965 CANBERRA sailed from San Diego for the Western Pacific, operating for 63 continuous days at sea as a temporary Radar Control Station Da Nang, South Vietnam. Her second Vietnam War deployment, February to June 1966, found her rendering naval gunfire support for friendly shore-based units in the Vietnam War zones of combat. On 11 October 1966, she again sailed to join the Seventh Fleet. From the time of her arrival in October until she left the line in April 1967, she fired more than 25,000 rounds of gunfire support. The cruiser participated in operations ranging from riding shotgun for a truck convoy to supporting the first full-scale landings in the Mekong Delta. In February 1967, she steamed north to join in "Operation SEA DRAGON" off North Vietnam. Her mission for 25 days was to deny the sea to the North Vietnamese logistic craft and disrupt the Vietnamese supply network. During this time CANBERRA fired on military and supply targets inland and patrolled the North Vietnamese coastal waters, earning a Meritorious Unit Commendation for her effective combat operations.

On 5 October 1967, CANBERRA departed San Diego for her fourth deployment to the Western Pacific in three years. She fired more than 32,000 rounds by 8 April 1968 when she departed the line for return to San Diego. Over 17,000 rounds were fired in CANBERRA's last 26 days on the line. During this period she averaged 664.7 rounds per day, or one round every two minutes and ten seconds. She was awarded a second Meritorious Unit Commendation.

(CAG 2)

On 1 May 1968, following her return from Vietnam, CANBERRA was redesignated the heavy cruiser CA 70, following twelve years as a guided missile cruiser, CAG 2. Her fifth deployment to the Western Pacific began with her departure from San Diego on 18 September 1968. During this deployment she was the flagship of Rear Admiral David H. Bagley, Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Force, U. S. Seventh Fleet. She returned to San Diego on 18 January 1969, had her missile system removed during 18-March to 23 July, and entered the Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard on 1 October 1969 for inactivation. She decommissioned 2 February 1970 and her name was struck from the Naval Vessel Register.

CANBERRA earned six battle stars for operations in World War II and six battle stars for operations during the Vietnam War as listed below:

1 Star/MARSHALL ISLANDS OPERATION:

Occupation of Eniwetok Atoll: 17-28 Feb 1944

1 Star/ASIATIC-PACIFIC RAIDS - 1944

Palau, Yap, Ulithi, Woleai Raid: 30 Mar-1 Apr 1944

Truk, Satawan, Ponape Raid: 29 Apr-1 May 1944

1 Star/HOLLANDIA OPERATION: 21-24 Apr 1944

1 Star/WESTERN NEW GUINEA OPERATIONS:

Morotai Landings: 15 Sep 1944

1 Star/MARIANAS OPERATION:

Capture and Occupation of Saipan: 11-24 Jun 1944

First Bonins Raid: 15-16 Jun 1944

Battle of the Philippine Sea: 19-20 Jun 1944

Second Bonins Raid: 24 Jun 1944

Third Bonins Raid: 3 Jul 1944

Capture & Occupation of Guam: 12-15 Jul 1944

Palau, Yap, Ulithi Raid: 25-27 Jul 1944

1 Star/WESTERN CAROLINE ISLANDS OPERATION:

Capture and Occupation of the Southern Palau Islands:

6 Sep-14 Oct 1944

Assaults on the Philippine Islands: 9-24 Sep 1944

1 Star/VIETNAM ADVISORY CAMPAIGN: 7 May 1965-12 May 1965

1 Star/VIETNAMESE COUNTEROFFENSIVE, PHASE II:

9 Nov 1966-13 Nov 1966

15 Nov 1966-19 Nov 1966

21 Nov 1966-23 Nov 1966

28 Jan 1967- 7 Feb 1967

1 Star/VIETNAMESE COUNTEROFFENSIVE, PHASE III;
16 Dec 1967-19 Dec 1967
9 Jan 1968-13 Jan 1968

1 Star/TET COUNTEROFFENSIVE
24 Feb 1968-27 Feb 1968
14 Mar 1968- 1 Apr 1968
4 Apr 1968-6 Apr 1968
8 Apr 1968 only

1 Star/VIETNAMESE COUNTEROFFENSIVE, PHASE V:
21 Oct 1968-24 Oct 1968
10 Nov 1968-14 Nov 1968

1 Star/VIETNAM COUNTEROFFENSIVE OPERATION, PHASE VI
30 Nov 1968- 2 Dec 1968
6 Dec 1968-12 Dec 1968
15 Dec 1968-18 Dec 1968

MERITORIOUS UNIT COMMENDATION - VIETNAM
9 February 1966- 8 June 1966

MERITORIOUS UNIT COMMENDATION - VIETNAM
17 Oct 1967-19 Apr 1968